

AUSTIN-HEALEY 100S

# 'HEALEY'S READY-MADE RACER

*The Austin-Healey 100S shone at great speed events from Sebring to Bonneville in its Fifties heyday – and this example still sees action today*

WORDS BEN FIELD PHOTOGRAPHY LYNDON MCNEIL

**F**LORIDA, MARCH, 1954. Lance Macklin and George Huntoon are racing an Austin-Healey special test car in the 12-Hour Grand Prix of Endurance at Sebring. Looking like a stripped-down 100/4, the 'Healey is apparently outclassed in a field that also contains Ferrari, Aston Martin and Lancia. But, six hours in, the 'Healey finds itself in fourth spot, already a victor against the attrition that's seen off some of its more glamorous rivals.

Further retirements and hard driving from Macklin put the 'Healey briefly in second place behind Stirling Moss's OSCA before a broken valve

rocker leaves the 100 limping on three cylinders into an eventual third place (and a win in the Sports 3000 Class).

The special test car was one of a series of prototypes for a ready-to-race production car being developed by Donald and Geoffrey Healey – the 100S. The 'S' stood for Sebring, an appellation decided before the great results of the 1954 12-Hours. The production car, like the special test cars, had an aluminium body, Dunlop disc brakes front and rear and a four-speed gearbox. The engine breathed through a handsome oval grille – part of a design makeover to clean up the lines of the 100 and make the S distinctly different from the



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standard car. A Weslake aluminium cylinderhead was designed to sit on the 2.6-litre block, and with a pair of 1 3/4 in SU carburettors the S had 132bhp against the 100's 90bhp.

Later in 1954 another 100S prototype averaged 132.29mph over 24 hours at Bonneville during one of Austin-Healey's most successful record-breaking forays. To mark this outing every production S bore a small dash-mounted plate assuring the owner he was driving a 'replica' of the record breaker.

The key market for the S was the US, where desire for small, potent European racing cars was strong. After Austin of America milked 1954's successes the clamour for the S from States-bound racers grew ever louder. Just 50 production cars were built at The Cape Works in Warwick during 1955. Most were finished in white-over-blue American racing colours and half of the 50 cars ended up in America with the remaining 25 distributed to buyers as far-flung as Madagascar.

Just six stayed in Britain and many would-be owners were thwarted because Donald Healey had no intention of building any more. David Shale, one-time owner of the 100S featured here, recalls how he got his hands on EVV 106. 'My father owned an Austin-Healey distributorship and he managed to pull a few strings with the Healeys.' But this was no case of a father spoiling his son. David Shale was a talented club racer whom Stirling Moss' long-time manager, Ken Gregory, was keen to sign up. The family business, S & W Motors of Northampton, would also benefit from the publicity if the car did well on the track.

The publicity machine was working before the S left the showroom for its first race. 'We called in the local press to do an article on the S and I told them it could do at least 130mph,' says Shale. 'I also told them it couldn't be run below 50mph because the plugs would foul up. I'd been caught speeding in other cars and wanted a ready-made excuse for the S. I insisted the reporter print it, and he did.'

But Shale's ticket-dodging tale was a fiction – the S could easily be driven on the road. Yet there was one truth that Shale couldn't live with: its colour scheme. 'I've got nothing against Americans,' he says, 'but I was damned if I was going to drive the car in American racing colours.' Off it went for a respray.

Shale and the now British Racing Green S took part in their first race, at the March 1955 British Automobile Racing Club meet at Goodwood, and took second place. 'The likes of the Jaguar XK120 and Aston Martin DB 2/4 couldn't keep up with it. It handled well too,' Shale remembers.

The S was usually trailered to events, but Shale drove it to the Silverstone meet in May 1955: 'I was late and driving like hell when I



1955 Austin-Healey 100S

**Engine** 2660cc, in-line four-cylinder, ohv, two 2in (originally 1 3/4 in) SU carburettors **Power and torque** 180bhp @ 5300rpm; 180lb ft @ 2800rpm (originally 132bhp @ 4700rpm; 168lb ft @ 2500rpm) **Transmission** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Steering** Cam-and-lever **Suspension** Front: independent, coil springs, Armstrong RXP hydraulic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, semi-elliptic springs, Armstrong RXP hydraulic dampers, anti-roll bar **Brakes** Discs front and rear **Weight** 856kg (1888lb) **Performance** Top speed: 120mph; 0-60mph: 7.8sec **Cost new** £1200 **Value now** \$500,000

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came round a corner and a herd of cows was blocking the road. I ended up in a field with a Jersey licking my face.' After Silverstone, where Shale finished fourth, the '55 season ended in a flurry of thirds.

At the end of May 1955 another 100S was being readied for Le Mans. Lance Macklin had privately entered one of the original S prototypes with Les Leston as co-driver. Even though it wasn't an official factory entry the pair got full backing from Austin-Healey. On race day the car was running well, but two hours in Macklin braked to avoid Mike Hawthorn's D-type that was slowing for the pits. Pierre Levegh in a Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR hit the S and was launched off the track, killing Levegh and more than 80 spectators.

Earlier in 1955 Austin-Healey entered a team of four 100Ss into the final running of the Mille Miglia. To win support from the Italian crowd two were painted red. One, OON 440, was driven to an impressive 11th place by George Abecassis. It was the best-placed British car in the race, but the other three 'Healeys didn't fare so well. Two crashed out, while Lance Macklin brought his S in 36th after battling with a broken throttle linkage.

Back in England Shale's second, and final

year, of 100S racing saw him achieve firsts at Aintree and Snetterton and second in class in the 1956 *Autosport* Championship behind John Dalton in another 100S.

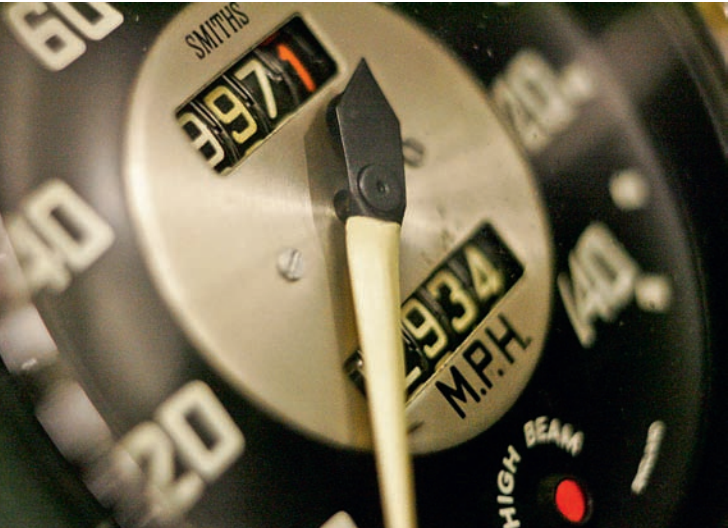
Shale feels he could have done a lot better with the S had his father not been such a stickler for originality: 'Because of the Austin-Healey tie-in I wasn't permitted to do any mechanical modifications to my car. My father had said it was "not to be touched". One of my main rivals was John Dalton. His 100S (RWD 132) had a few engine modifications and I was always sitting in his dust.' Despite his father's ruling, Shale did attempt minor modifications and they didn't go unnoticed. 'The 100S also overheated occasionally and I annoyed Donald Healey by cutting chunks out of the bodywork to try to keep it cool. Pictures of this appeared in *Autosport* and Healey would say: "What's this bloody idiot think he's doing?"'

Shale sold the S to Mike Kellett in 1957 and went on to race a much-modified 100/6. Kellett campaigned EVV 106 over the next two years alongside two more 100Ss as part of Team Triple S. The car was rolled at Oulton Park in 1958 and ended up with well-known British driver Tony Lanfranchi for 1959. He only drove the car competitively a few times, but proved its versatility by competing in track, hill climb and sprint events before EVV burst into flames in a race at Rufforth. After West Yorkshire BMC dealer Derek Buller-Sinfield had bought and sprinted EVV briefly in the early Sixties it was sold to Austin-Healey collector Arthur Carter and remained in his collection for 42 years until another avid marque enthusiast persuaded him to sell it.

Born in the era of Austin-Healey's pomp, David Large grew up in Warwick, knew the Healey family and was surrounded by their cars at what he describes as 'an impressionable age'. He still owns his first 'Healey, a Frogeye Sprite, but by the early Nineties he had set his heart on a 100S. The only problem was finding someone willing to sell him one.

'It became clear to me that there were only two cars with good racing pedigree in the UK – EVV 106 and the Mille Miglia car,' says Large. 'Both were owned by Arthur Carter and I spent the next few years working on how to get in touch with him to convince him that I was a worthy candidate for one. It wasn't easy.'

An approach through legendary saloon car racer Gerry Marshall, who had sold Carter several 'Healeys, and a persuasive letter from Large both failed to get an immediate response. But a couple of years later Carter rang Large to tell him the David Shale car was finally for sale. Large had to act fast: 'Arthur said I had to be there within a few days or he would sell it to someone else,' he recalls. 'At the time I was living in Switzerland. I booked a flight to



Thorough restoration took care not to mar EVV 106's evocative period patina



Oval grille, competition screen and de-bumpered front and rear help distinguish this from a 100/4



Recent mods help yield 180bhp – 48bhp up on original output and double a standard 'Healey 100's



Turn-in is neat and workmanlike for a 55-year-old car with cam-and-lever steering



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### ‘Turning into corners you’re never overcome by the inertia of a weighty body that’s reluctant to follow you up the road’

London for the next day and went to see Arthur at his farm in Norfolk. The deal was done and I was finally the proud owner of EVV 106.’

It was now 2004 and Large was keen to drive his prize, but first it needed careful restoration. Warwick-based Austin-Healey expert JME was chosen to do the work. Large explains: ‘In Jonathan Everard (owner of JME) I had someone who had worked for the Healeys, had spent his entire working life rebuilding ‘Healeys and lived and breathed ‘Healeys.’

The project took two and a half years and was finished at JME’s new home, The Cape Works, where EVV 106 had been born in 1955.

The restoration is stunning, but not in a glitzy, Pebble Beach style. This is a fully-restored car that hasn’t had all the wonderful patina polished out of it. It looks, feels and smells original – a racing car that’s been restored for the track.

It’s a bitingly cold day, but sitting low, clasped in a green bucket seat and hemmed in by the tall transmission tunnel and big three-spoke wheel, the weather barely intrudes. You focus on the simple array of gauges and peer through a windscreen little more than a handspan high. Turn the key and the fuel pump gurgles; press the starter button and there’s an eruption of noise as the twin side-exit exhaust rips out an urgent, bass-laden tune. The clutch bites and the cold rear tyres slither for grip.

First gear is very long – this is one of five 100Ss fitted with the optional Aston Martin gearbox. The rebuilt engine has been modified to improve induction and exhaust for better breathing and a steel crank to withstand high revs. The result is a unit you can rev to

6000rpm, which puts out 180bhp and a matching amount of torque. So that long first gear doesn’t get in the way as much now, but in David Shale’s day his unmodified S with 132bhp would have taken a while to reach racing speed. No wonder he often ate John Dalton’s dust.

In second and third the S surges ahead, happily hammering towards the 6000rpm redline. Pull the gearstick into fourth and the car will hold high road speeds for as long as you want. It’s perfectly suited to long-distance road events like the Mille Miglia retrospective, in which it has already taken part with Jonathan Everard driving and David Large navigating. More reliability trials and possibly even some circuit racing are in the offing too.

Performance is impressive, but it’s not the only thing you remember about this car. There’s the lightness: it really doesn’t feel much heavier to drive than its Sprite baby brother. Turning into corners you’re never overcome by the inertia of a weighty body that’s reluctant to follow you up the road. This lightness works wonderfully with steering that has none of the slop and wander you usually get with a cam-and-lever set-up.

Today speculators pounce when any of the 38 surviving 100s are offered for sale. These cars might well be valued in the hundreds of thousands, but drive one and you realise this is still a very capable and enjoyable clubman’s car. If high prices were to stop the 100S being used for what it’s best at, that would be a tragedy. **CB**

**Thanks to:** Jonathan Everard, David Shale, David Large



### Want a 100S but don’t have £500k?

**JME Healeys builds** 100S recreations at Austin-Healey’s old factory. These painstakingly accurate copies of the originals feature all-aluminium panels, Dunlop disc brakes and the S-spec engine.

Company boss Jonathan Everard (above) served his apprenticeship at ‘Healey’s Warwick factory, The Cape Works, and in 1969 began working with his father Harold, another former ‘Healey employee.

In 1978 he founded JME, specialising in repairing, restoring and competition-prepping Austin-Healeys, and in 2008 he bought The Cape Works and moved JME there from Leamington Spa.

Everard is a useful rally driver who’s competed for more than 40 years in Austin-Healeys with notable first places in the British Historic Rally Championship and individual events including the London to Cortina Classic Marathon. Most recently he drove EVV 106 on the 2008 and ‘09 Mille Miglia events with owner David Large navigating.

See [www.jmehealeys.co.uk](http://www.jmehealeys.co.uk) for details.